Danica Cantrell

ENGL 340 01

2/28/12

All Eyes on Audrey

In 2012, we look back on Audrey Hepburn as a style icon, a recognized humanitarian, and for her charming roles in *Roman Holiday* *and Breakfast at Tiffany’s.* Being in this appointed time in history, I’ve always looked at Audrey Hepburn in her movies and photographs as a striking woman who managed to combine beauty with innocence, simplicity with depth, sophistication with spontaneity, and confidence with humility. Mark Shaw’s work on the set of Sabrina not only elevated his career, it allowed the audience of the early 1950s to catch a glimpse of this up and coming movie star being a down-to-earth woman, doing everyday things. In the photo shoot Audrey Hepburn is seen getting her hair done, reading and generally lounging around the house, but despite this, looking glamorous. It is this juxtaposition of ‘casual sophistication’ typified by Mark Shaw’s photography that can be seen as a primary trend or pattern among the three images I chose from his shoot.

Audrey Hepburn made her debut in her role in *Roman Holiday* in 1953, a time when women’s roles consisted of domesticity and family life, in the recovery from WWII. The audience of LIFE magazine in 1953 would have been middle-class white people. This is the context for which Mark Shaw, as rhetor, was commissioned to go in and photograph this rising star on the set of *Sabrina* (Charmed 11), and for the three pictures I chose from. The front cover of LIFE magazine December 7, 1953 featuring Audrey Hepburn sets the tone for understanding the purpose behind Mark Shaw’s work. She is sitting on the floor of what looks like a living room setting with a phone up to her cheek, casually dressed in a man’s shirt. While this is not one of the pictures I chose to analyze, it’s important to note what Mark Shaw chose from among his pictures as the front cover, as it explains a lot. There are two pieces of text on the cover. The one says “Miss Hepburn at Home” and the other “What makes Audrey Charm”. Only the second out of the three images I chose from his shoot appeared in LIFE magazine in 1953. The other two were part of a collection of negatives that were found in 2005 and published in *Charmed by Audrey: Life on the Set of Sabrina* in 2008. All three images I found by going online.

If ‘casual sophistication’ is the trend of the three photos, the first picture definitely emphasizes the casual element. This picture is of Audrey lying sprawled on a couch wearing only a man’s shirt and holding a book. It is full of discontinuous signs (Barthes). There are many denoted elements in the picture that one can be drawn to initially: Audrey’s eyes, her legs, the striped couch matching the curtain above, the large pillow she’s leaning on, the large book she’s holding. She's lying down on her side with her right arm bent behind her head and her hand supporting the book. She apparently did lots of reading on the set, so the fact that she has a book is not forced. But this whole pose the more I look at it looks not as natural as I first thought. The fact that she’s holding a book connotes curiosity and the plant beside her on the right connotes a sense of freshness or aliveness. The connotation associated with her face angled towards us, and her eyes wide are friendliness, approachability, and contentedness. While Audrey’s obviously trying to have some personal time, she’s allowing Mark Shaw to photograph her, which gives credence to the ethos of the rhetor. We as the audience also feel allowed into Audrey’s private world, which was refreshing both to people in 1953 as it is for people in 2012.

Looking at her arm back behind her head, it’s as if she’s posing. This element of posing (reminiscent of old Hollywood starlets), along with her earrings and makeup, which accentuate her features, evokes this element of glamour and style. Audrey was becoming seen as a style icon in 1953 for her short hair and outfits, and people of 2012 still see her as one. This contrasts with the large pillow and man’s shirt she’s wearing, which are metaphors for comfort, ease, and relaxation. One must also note that she is in an indoor setting, and a homey setting at that, which is a non-coded iconic message. The coded-iconic message is the fact that domesticity and home life were central for women in the 1950’s. Her exposed legs and hips, which would connote sexiness and are at the center of the image, contrast with her face that our eyes are always led back to, which appears innocent and kind. There’s a real contrast between the striped sofa and curtains and her plain white blouse; in fact her plain white shirt lies between the two striped elements in the room (in terms of composition of the picture), making her the focus despite there being interesting patterns around.

The vertical lines from the stripes on the couch and curtain contrasts with her body being so horizontal. The black and white coloration of the photo is a denotation that one can’t fail to notice. Mark Shaw’s choice of coloration connotes a timeless feel to the picture, a quality that is reminiscent of old Hollywood glamour. Perhaps Mark Shaw is suggesting that Audrey too is and will be worthy of being placed in such a category. Through all of this our minds rest on the conclusion that Miss Hepburn is a beautiful contradiction: the epitome of the dyads of relaxation/vigor, style/casualness, and movie star/everyday woman. At the same time she is both opening up, denoted by her open body language, and holding something back, the turn of her head and eye. This “everyday” quality that the picture exudes makes us identify with Audrey, and all that she represents.

**The second picture is of Audrey strolling along side** her Beverly Hills apartment during the shooting of Sabrina. Some signs in the picture, or the text, that one can pick up right away are the white picket fence to her left, the brick pathway she’s walking on, the white house to her right, the fence off in the distance, the tree to the front left of her, and the fact that her head is turned back towards us. Like the first picture, we are being given the chance to peak into Audrey’s private world, and once again, she is allowing us to follow along with her. We feel this by the way that she is directly looking at the camera (thus at the audience) and she has a slight smile. At the same time, compared with the first image where her body is open and vulnerable, her back is turned on us in this picture, which connotes and is a signified of secrecy or privacy. Like the first image, however, her face is turned towards us, beckoning us to watch her.

This time Audrey is outdoors in front of her house, which connotes informality and a homey vibe; people reading LIFE magazine in 1953 would appreciate seeing this movie star on a level with themselves. There is a sense of privacy also in the fact that she is framed by a fence on the left and a house on the right, which are signifiers, and not just anyone is allowed back there. The picket fence is a readymade that people in 2012 would understand, for its connotations of the 1950’s typical post WWII family life. In the context of this picture, the picket fence and paved path are **metaphors** for idyllic life in Hollywood which we want to **identify** with. This coded-iconic message and its connotations may not have existed in the 1950’s; to the audience of the 1950’s they would see the fence in this picture as nice fence. However, Mark Shaw may have used it as a method of pathos to reach his audience in the 1950’s, and it still works for people today. Also, the fact that he captures her walking on a path has connotations that she has a straight shot ahead of her, a future that is paved out before her; but with her upper body and head facing back, she's still looking to the past.

The tree as a denotation to her left connotes freshness and naturalness, and being so close to her face it works to compliment her face; thus it inspires the same connotations for her. However these natural, unpretentious connotations contrast an alluring sexuality that is apparent. Despite her being all clothed in this one, her clothing is rather tight-fitting, her backside is exposed to us, and her eyes and smile are aimed at us. Like the first one, I feel like she's beckoning to the viewer to watch and/or follow her, while at the same time she’s obviously doing her own thing. What she's wearing (the pants and white blouse) connotes independence and self-sufficiency, which contrasts with the styles typically seen of women at the time in pretty feminine dresses. Her unique, chic style would inspire identification both with audiences then and now. All in all, this juxtaposition of ‘casual sophistication’ is evident in the photo due **the iconicity in the image.**

**The third image in the series is different than the other two in the fact that Audrey’s face is the center of attention, with the rest of her body only partially in views and completely covered at that. Her hair, her eye, her open mouth, the fact that she’s getting her hair dried, etc are all part of the iconicity of the image. This is was one of Mark Shaw’s favorite pictures he shot of Audrey off the set of *Sabrina*, and it’s no wonder why. It depicts Audrey in a setting and in a position not many movie stars are shown in. She’s not in her *Roman Holiday* princess attire, with her hair and expression all composed. The iconicity of her wild, spiky hair connotes a quirky, fun-loving, unique girl, which today enhances our understanding of this charming Hollywood icon.**

**However, this particular image was never published in LIFE magazine, but Mark Shaw’s hope in shooting these types of photos was to show her as a down-to earth, everyday woman who just like everyone else gets her hair done and doesn’t always look perfect. The ironic thing however, is that despite her crazy hairstyle and surprised/caught-off guard expression, Audrey Hepburn looks particularly chic and stylish. The fact that there’s a lady behind her with a towel to her hair shows that Audrey Hepburn doesn’t just wake up in a ball gown with perfect hair and makeup—it takes a team of professionals to help her get her ‘look’. But whether she’s all dolled up or in the process, Mark Shaw wants to show the public audience that she’s still the same girl. Her beauty, classiness and good humor, denoted in her sidewise glancing eyes, open mouth and wild hair, transcends context (time or place). Likewise her beauty and charm appear to be something that resides within her, because no matter where she is, or what she’s doing (shooting a scene on Sabrina or getting her hair done), that beauty and charm radiate outward; how even when her hair isn’t looking perfect she has a kind of stylish elegance.**

**It’s this contrast or juxtaposition of ‘casual sophistication’** that is patterned throughout these three contiguous images by Mark Shaw. While only the second out of the three was actually published in LIFE magazine in 1953, the intent and purpose still remain: To show Audrey Hepburn from a perspective that few ever get the chance to see: Her at home reading, relaxing, getting her hair done, smoking, eating, riding her bike—everything that would humanize this seemingly goddess-like portrayal we usually see. Since it was only in 2008 that more than 50 negatives were found of Mark’s shoot, we can safely say in 2012 that **Audrey appeared to be a whimsical, fun-loving, stylish, deep, beautiful, elegant, girl who had typical every-day experiences like anyone else. But she was different in the fact that she was a combination of so many contradictions, and many people saw that in her time. Anthony Beauchamp said of her: “I couldn’t fathom that she was real. There were so many paradoxes in that face. Darkness and purity; depth and youth; stillness and animation. She had a fresh new look, a beauty that was ethereal” (Charmed 34). It was these contradictions that were the basis for Mark Shaw’s photography shoot, and it is these contradictions that have made generations fall in love with he**r.